



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

TODD P. GRAVES

Contact Don Ledford, Public Affairs • (816) 426-4220 • 400 East Ninth Street, Room 5510 • Kansas City, MO 64106

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLUMBIA MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO MANUFACTURING METH

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Columbia, Mo., man pleaded guilty in federal court today to manufacturing methamphetamine.

Jeffrey Gayle Merritt, 36, of Columbia, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright this morning to manufacturing 500 grams or more of methamphetamine.

Merritt was arrested on July 12, 2003. Law enforcement officers, after receiving information from a local Wal-Mart security guard regarding the purchase of acetone and glassware, searched **Merritt's** apartment. According to Graves, they found numerous items commonly used to manufacture methamphetamine, including glass jars containing various liquids and sludge, numerous blister packs of pseudoephedrine and lithium battery casings. Just outside the apartment officers found numerous propane tanks which smelled of anhydrous ammonia, empty blister packs of cold tablets, and other items also associated with the manufacture of methamphetamine. Officers also found Tupperware bowls, jars and plastic bags containing methamphetamine in the apartment.

Merritt is the fourth and final defendant in this case to plead guilty. On Jan. 27, 2004, co-defendants **Chadwick Wayne Acison**, 27, **Sharon L. Baker**, 53, and **Laurie Jean Loftus**, 23, all of Columbia, pleaded guilty charges related to manufacturing methamphetamine.

Acison admitted that he manufactured 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. **Acison** was arrested on Feb. 26, 2003, when law enforcement officers were called to the home of **Baker**, **Acison's** mother, because they encountered a man running from the area who had an order of protection pending against him that prohibited contact with **Baker**. As the officers stood at the sliding glass door of **Baker's** apartment, they smelled a strong odor of ether and chemical solvent consistent with the manufacture of methamphetamine. Officers also saw **Acison's** car parked

near the apartment. Inside the car were two cans of starting fluid and a blister pack of ephedrine, items used in the production of methamphetamine.

While executing a search warrant of **Baker's** apartment and **Acison's** vehicle, Graves said, officers found methamphetamine and items consistent with the manufacture of methamphetamine. While executing a search warrant of **Acison's** trailer, officers recovered an operational methamphetamine laboratory.

Baker admitted that she knowingly made her apartment at 2939 Leeway Dr. available for the purpose of unlawfully manufacturing, storing and distributing methamphetamine.

Loftus admitted that she knowingly made her residence at 3406 Range Line, which she shared with **Acison**, available for the purpose of unlawfully manufacturing, storing and distributing methamphetamine.

Under federal statutes, **Merritt** could be subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison without parole, up to life imprisonment, plus a fine up to \$4 million. His sentence will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Lynn. It was investigated by MUSTANG (the Mid-Missouri Unified Strike Team and Narcotics Group), the Boone County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Hallsville, Mo., Police Department, the Columbia, Mo., Police Department, and the Boone County, Mo., Fire Protection District – Hazmat Methamphetamine Response Team.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow